



THE SHAMBHALA MEDITATION
CENTER
OF ST. JOHNSBURY

802-748-4240

17 EASTERN AVENUE
(BELOW THE STAR THEATER)
ST. JOHNSBURY, VT 05819
PO Box 66

WWW.STJSHAMBHALA.ORG

JULY NEWSLETTER 2005

INWARD QUESTIONS

“Why do I feel the way I do? Who am I? What should I do? Why am I experiencing this?” Isn't this where it all begins? Aren't these the questions that we continually ask ourselves, even as adults, and even though our culture relegates these questions to the process of growing up that is supposed to be over at a certain age?

Questions, either spoken or contemplated, have served as the catalyst for change throughout history. Collective change, be it political, economic or cultural, is often sparked by a question that begins as an inner contemplation that is generally answered with words and actions that are external to the original question and attempt to offer a solution that will put an end to the question rather than answer it. Outward lines of questioning generally end up providing answers that in turn provoke more lines of questioning that all too often become a circular argument. So we find ourselves asking the same question over and over and over again, thinking they are fresh questions when they are merely the same questions in different words.

This is the cycle in which belief systems find seed as answers to questions that provoke more questions. It is all too human to want a tangible answer; something that provides a little hope. Where does this leave us? Is there any hope of an answer to all our questions? Twenty six hundred years ago, Buddha Shakyamuni asked a line of questions about suffering that led inward rather than outward. The following excerpt from Crazy Wisdom by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche lays out a path of questioning that draws the questioner inward.

“This happens in our own lives. We feel a sense of confusion it seems to be confusion but that confusion brings out something that is worth exploring. The questions that we ask in the midst of our confusion are potent questions. We ask: “Who am I? What am I? What is this? What is life?” and so forth. Then we explore further and ask: “In fact, who on earth asked those questions? Who is the person who asked, ‘What is?’ Or even, ‘What is what is?’”. We go on and on with this questioning, further and further inward. In some way, this is non-theistic spirituality in its fullest sense. External situations do not stimulate us to model ourselves on further external situations.

Rather, the external situations that exist speak to us of our confusion and this makes us think more, [ask] think further. Once we have begun to do that, then of course there is the other problem: once we have found out who and what we are, how do we apply what we have learned to our living situation? How do we put it into practice?

“There seem to be two possible approaches here. One is trying to live up to what we would like to be. The other is trying to live what we are. Trying to live up to what we would like to be is like pretending we are a divine being or realized person, or whatever we would like to call the model. When we realize what is wrong with us, what our weakness is, what our problems and neuroses are, the automatic temptation is to try to act just the opposite as though we have never heard of such a thing as our being wrong or confused. This approach is known in the Buddhist tradition as spiritual materialism, which means not being realistic.

“Now let's talk about the second possible approach, that of trying to live the way you are. This possibility is connected with our seeing our confusion, or misery, or pain, but not making those discoveries into an answer. Instead we explore further and further and further without looking for an answer. It is a process of working with ourselves, with our lives, with our psychology, without looking for an answer, but seeing things as they are seeing what goes on in our heads directly and simply, absolutely literally. If we can undertake a process like that, then there is a tremendous possibility that our confusion might become a further basis for investigation. Then we look further and further and further. We don't make a big point or an answer out of any one thing. For example, we might think that because we have discovered one particular thing that is wrong with us, that must be it, that must be the problem, that must be the answer. We don't fixate on that, we go further. “Why is this the case? Why is this so? Why is there spirituality? Why is there awakening? Why is there this moment of relief? Why? Why? Why?” We go on deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper until we reach the point where there is no answer. There is not even a question. Both question and answer die simultaneously at some point.

At that point, we tend to give up hope of an answer, or anything whatsoever, for that matter. We have no more hope, none whatsoever. We are purely hopeless. We could call this transcending hope, if you would like to put it in more genteel terms.

This hopelessness is the essence of crazy wisdom. It is beyond hopelessness. (Of course it would be possible, if we tried to turn that hopelessness into some kind of solution, to become confused again, to say the least.)

The process is one of going further in and in and in without any reference point of spirituality, without any reference point of savior, without any reference point of goodness or badness without any reference points whatsoever! This process of discovery automatically recharges itself so that we keep going deeper and deeper and deeper." Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, CRAZY WISDOM pp5-6, 9-10

"A crucial task for you as a student is to be clear about your own intention. If you don't clearly understand what you are looking for in a teacher or in internal work, you will inevitably accept someone else's agenda as your own. While you may start internal transformative work on the suggestion or advice of another person, at some point your practice has to become a response to your own questions about life and being. Your own suffering, however it manifests, is the basis and motivation of your practice. To lose sight of it is to lose connection with your reason for practicing. Another person's experience can never answer your own questions. You have to know what you want from your practice. Then you can know what you want in a teacher." WAKE UP TO YOUR LIFE, Ken McLeod

CENTER ACTIVITIES:

Center Study Programs

MEDITATION sessions are held Wednesdays and Thursdays from 6 to 7 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Nyinthuns occur the first Sunday of every summer month from 9a.m. until noon Group ngondro occurs in the Tantra Shrine Room during a Nyinthun

THE KHANDRO RINPOCHE STUDY GROUP is on vacation until Tuesday, September the 6th at 6:45 p.m.. It will then meet the first and third Tuesday of every month.

TAI CHI is taught and practiced on Tuesday nights from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Education Summer Schedule

AN EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE has been formed to help in setting the direction and schedule for education; talks, classes, and programs at the center. Members of that committee are Caroline DeMaio, Catherine Clark, Madge Rossinoff, Wayne Schoech, Susan Taney and Roger Guest. The committee is discussing plans for the fall which will include continuing the curriculum of the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies (we're entering the third cycle of classes) and an entry level class/weekend such as a book class on Turning the Mind into an Ally. The Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche will be visiting Karme Choling in September and we encourage sangha, new and old, to attend whatever part of the visit that they can.

Thursday July 21st Newcomb and Maron Greenleaf will give a talk on Emptiness in Action: Working with Threefold Purity at 7:15p.m. (Maron is Newcomb's daughter).

Sunday, July 31st at 9:30a.m. Talk by Roger Guest on The Heart Sutra.

Practice

SHRINE ROOM ROTA Thank you to everyone who has been signing up for shrine room shifts! Your support for the community's practice environment is essential. Please visit www.stjshambhala.info/thisMonth.php and sign up for July and August. If you'd like to receive instruction for the roles of gatekeeper or umdze, please contact Catherine Clark, ceclark@sover.net or 802-592-3102.

SUMMER NYINTHUN SCHEDULE It would be wonderful if we could all practice together July 3rd and August 7th, from 9a.m. to noon. These summer nyinthun sessions are an opportunity to renew your connection to practice and our community, and provide a respite from the summer's busy schedule. We will return to the regular nyinthun schedule, 9am to noon and 1pm-4pm, on September 4th.

A NOTE FOR UMDZES Please note that we are now using a table, rather than stacking cushions, on the umdze stand. We will continue to use votive candles on the Main and Shambhala shrines during the summer months when we use fans in the shrine room.

SADHAKAS The next two Vajrayogini feasts will be held in St. Johnsbury on July 30th, and August 28th.

MEDITATION INSTRUCTORS AND SHAMBHALA GUIDES will have their next meeting on Thursday evening, July 28th, at 7:15p.m.. Our topic will be Refuge Vows. In preparation for this meeting, please read Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche's little red book on Refuge, available at Samadhi, and Trungpa Rinpoche's chapter on refuge in Heart of the Buddha. REFUGE VOWS with Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche will be offered at Karne Choling the weekend of September 23-25. Refuge Vows is a public ceremony in which one formally becomes a Buddhist. If you are interested in taking these vows, please discuss this possibility with your Meditation Instructor.

'Being a Buddhist is simply following your heart and mind. It is fundamentally a way of living, of how to be. We make this commitment in a public situation so that we can mark the day that we have actually entered. That way it is very clear in our minds that we are on a path, that we have a certain attitude in terms of how we work with our life.' Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

Executive Committee

OPEN POSITIONS on the Executive Committee that are in need of enthusiastic volunteers are: Directors and Publicity. In addition, the Newsletter is searching for a new Editor.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING will happen on the second Tuesday of every month at the Center. All are welcome to attend!

Executive Committee:

- Directors: open
- Shambhala Training: open
- Practice: Catherine Clark
- Finance: Vickie Schafer
- Facilities: Michael Taney
- Publicity: open
- Study: Caroline DeMaio
- Secretary: Linda Waarner
- Rusung: Michael Taney
- Membership: Merle Thompson (and advisory committee)
- Communications: David Wilde (please send all announcements to him)

Service Personnel:

- Librarian: Michael Beauregard
- Shrine Keeper: Alan Boye
- Recycling: Sandy Raynor

